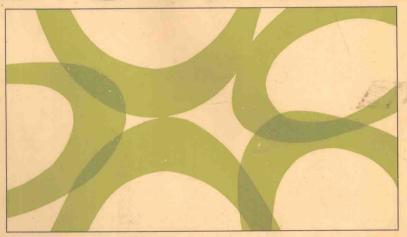
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Understanding International Relations

ROBERT J. LIEBER

No Common Power

Understanding International Relations

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Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown College Division Scott, Foresman and Company

Glenview, Illinois

Boston

London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lieber, Robert J., 1941– No common power.

Includes index.

1. International relations. 2. Balance of power.

I. Title.

JX1395.L475 1988 327 87-23259

ISBN 0-673-39737-8

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 - KPF - 93 92 91 90 89 88 87

Printed in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

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Preface

A phrase authored by Thomas Hobbes more than three centuries ago captures the intrinsic problem which underlies world politics. Because they are "without a common power" in their international relations, states exist in a system where there is no effective authority for resolving the inevitable disputes which arise among them. In essence, this means that at least formally states dwell in an environment of quasi-anarchy. At the same time, however, the everyday conditions of world affairs display a great deal of practical order. It is the contrast of these two forces, the paradox of formal anarchy and practical order, that conditions the manner in which world politics takes place and constrains state behavior. Attention to this interplay is what shapes the orientation of this book. The underlying approach is set out in Chapter 1; however, it is worth summarizing briefly at this point.

In essence, three basic problems condition international relations. Two of these exist at the level of the international system. The first is the problem of *anarchy*—i.e., the fact that states inhabit a world without an overall authority or governing body. This is what sets international relations apart from domestic politics. The quasi-anarchic international environment shapes these relations fundamentally, imposes imperatives of power, and explains a great deal about why conflict occurs. Understanding of this point goes well beyond common sense. For example, it helps explain why such savagery can sometimes occur at the international level, and why rational policymakers find themselves required to prepare for war.

The second problem is that of *order*. Human efforts to achieve this in the international realm have been real and continual. Despite incessant—and often disastrous—reversals, realities of order and cooperation exist not only in rudimentary international rules, but also in the more extensive spread of international economic relations and interdependence.

Third, and at the level of individual state behavior within the international system, there is the problem of *constraint*. Most governments do not have the kind of freedom of choice suggested by more traditional scholarly approaches as well as by many contemporary analyses. Instead, limits on the autonomy of countries and their policymakers are imposed by the imperatives of power and order as well as by the interpenetration of international and domestic politics.

In consequence, this book is organized in a way which incorporates the phenomena of both anarchy and order at the level of the international system, as well as the impact of constraints at the level of state behavior. The approach taken here derives not only from my own experience in teaching, but also from years of research and writing. It is also influenced, in part, by an interest in applying ideas to the "real world." As a result, this book is positioned near the intersection between the world of affairs and the world of ideas.

For many readers, especially advanced undergraduate students, this book will be used in the only general international relations course they take. For others, who may be going on to more intensive study, this book will help to shape the way in which they comprehend the subject. In either case, its impact may persist, whether they later become practitioners or scholars, or simply seek to acquire a sound grasp of international relations in their lives as educated citizens. With these considerations in mind, it is essential to avoid the twin perils of overemphasis on theory and methodology at one extreme, or of a current events focus (or hyperfactualism) at the other. This book seeks to provide the basis for students of international relations, and other readers as well, to grasp future events and to ask the proper questions.

Part I, Introduction: The Context of World Politics, provides detailed consideration of the problems outlined above. It suggests how the reader can manage the task of making sense of international relations and devotes particular attention to the security dilemma:* the problem that in the absence of an effective international authority for resolving inevitable disputes, states need to rely on themselves for security. The result of this "self-help" system, however, is that other states face the same situation and also arm to provide their own security—as each defines it. Other things being equal, the end product is that each state ultimately may be less secure. Chapter 2 goes on to assess the broad outlines of the international system in which the modern state functions. While considering the historical background, it devotes particular attention to the ways in which the post—World War II pattern differs from what had gone before.

Part II, The Postwar System: East-West Conflict, North-South Conflict, and Nuclear Weapons, treats those phenomena which make international relations in the post-1945 world unique. The first of these features is Soviet-American bipolarity. In Chapters 3 and 4 the book analyzes the origins and development of the Cold War and East-West relations. Chapter 5 then considers the emergence of North-South conflict, including the impact of decolonization, ethnicity as a major source of friction, dilemmas of development, and the

^{*} The term security dilemma originates with John H. Herz, Political Realism and Political Idealism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). Its antecedents can be found in the writings of Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. More recent important formulations and elaborations have been provided by Kenneth Waltz, Glenn Snyder, Robert Jervis, and others. The concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

distinction between more and less successful developing countries ("third" versus "fourth" worlds). In turn, Chapter 6 addresses nuclear weapons and world politics, examining the implied penetration of the nation-state, basic concepts essential to the understanding of nuclear deterrence, arms control, and the conduct of international relations in a nuclear world.

Part III, Watersheds in Twentieth-Century International Relations, deals with a series of international events and crises which are a common twentieth-century legacy. These events not only reflect the interplay of the forces with which the book is concerned, but their impact has conditioned the contemporary understanding of international relations. Chapter 7 contrasts interpretations of the past based on 1914 (the outbreak of World War I) and 1938–39 (appeasement of Nazi Germany and the start of World War II). Chapter 8 explores the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 and the different interpretations which have evolved from a confrontation which brought the United States and the Soviet Union closer to the brink of nuclear war than at any time in their history. Chapters 9 and 10 consider the lessons of America's involvement in Vietnam, and then of the oil decade, with its consequences not only for the oil-importing democracies, but also for the perception of world politics held by the developing countries.

Part IV, Order and the "Anarchical Society," shifts the focus away from conflict and competition and toward consideration of the ways in which states have sought to prevent war and to provide order to their relations. The section begins, in Chapter 11, by considering the causes of war. This chapter emphasizes the systemic factors which create a propensity for periodic conflicts to erupt into warfare—as exemplified in the paradigmatic cases of the Arab-Israeli Six Day War of June 1967 and the 1982 Falklands War between Britain and Argentina. It contrasts these cases with the manner in which domestic structures tend to contain conflicts. Chapter 12 then examines the search for order at the global level, through the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the development of international law. Chapter 13 explores more limited efforts at order, undertaken at the regional level and embodied in the experience of Western Europe. Finally, Chapter 14 analyzes patterns of economic order. The search for economic cooperation and the pursuit of national economic interest have resulted in a pervasive interdependence and the establishment of international "regimes" to provide the framework—or rules of the game within which much economic interaction takes place.

In Part V, Conclusion: Anarchy, Order, and Constraint, the book ends by weighing the phenomena of interdependence against those of power politics, including the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy, and the contrast between systemic perspectives and the perceptions of individual states, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union. This final chapter also

reflects on the relationship between policymaking and global risk, encompassing the limits of certainty in political action, moral and collective action dilemmas, and a neorealist imperative which conditions policymaking in the late twentiethcentury world.

This book is an original piece of work, which builds upon themes foreshadowed in a number of my earlier writings. These include, in particular, *Theory and World Politics* (Winthrop and Little, Brown, 1972); *The Oil Decade* (Praeger and University Press of America, 1983 and 1986); and my contributions to *Eagle Defiant: United States Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (Little, Brown, 1983) and *Eagle Resurgent? The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy* (Little, Brown, 1987). Chapter 11 here (in its discussion of game theory, Prisoner's Dilemma, and the causes of conflict) draws on parts of Chapters 2 and 5 in *Theory and World Politics*; and part of Chapter 10 draws on portions of Chapter 6 in *Eagle Resurgent?*

While the writing of this book has been entirely an individual effort, it is a pleasure to acknowledge those to whom I am in one way or another indebted. As a student well over two decades ago, I benefitted greatly from the teaching of Leon Epstein, John Armstrong, Walter Agard, and George Mosse at the University of Wisconsin; from the late Hans Morgenthau at the University of Chicago; and from Henry Kissinger, Stanley Hoffmann, Karl Deutsch, Samuel Beer, and Louis Hartz at Harvard.

In developing the approach which underlies this book, I have gained valuable insights from working with my collaborators, Kenneth Oye and Donald Rothchild, in the Eagle books; from the realist analyses of Avner Yaniv vis-à-vis the harsh circumstances of the Middle East; and from the observations of Kenneth Waltz in California faculty colloquia. Others have provided valuable suggestions and comments concerning portions of the manuscript. In the end, I have gratefully incorporated many of their suggestions, even while flagrantly disregarding others. They include Robert Paarlberg, Robert Art, Roy Licklider, William V. O'Brien (especially on Chapter 12), Benjamin Cohen and George Crane (on Chapter 14), Richard Stites, and Nancy Lieber. Mark Lagon has performed in an exemplary manner as research assistant and constructive critic. I also wish to express my thanks to Gerry McCauley, Don Palm, and John Covell. all of whom encouraged me to write this book. Georgetown University, and its Government Department under the chairmanship of my colleague, R. Bruce Douglass, has provided a stimulating and supportive environment in which I could undertake the writing of this book. Finally, I am happy to note the contributions of the other Liebers: Richard, Beatrice, Benjamin, Keir and Ruth.

I am indebted to all of the above, though—for good or ill—responsibility for what appears in these pages remains my own.

—Washington, D.C. June 1987

Contents

Part :	I	
Intro	duction: The Context of World Politics	1
1	Understanding International Relations 3	
	Three Problems of International Relations 5	
	The Problem of Anarchy and the Security Dilemma 5 The Problem of Order 6 The Problem of Constraint 8	
	Twentieth-Century Approaches 10	
	Power and Neorealism 12	
2	The International System and the Modern State 17	
	The Modern Nation-State System 18	
	The Post-World War II Pattern: Similarities and	
	Differences 24	
	The Emergent Global System 25	
Part	TT	
	Postwar System:	
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
-	West Conflict, North-South Conflict,	
and I	Nuclear Weapons 29	
3	The East-West Conflict: Origins 31	
	Background: America and Russia before the Cold War	32
	Ideology and Power in Soviet Behavior 34	
	Early Years of the Cold War, 1945-48 35	
	The American Response 37	

5

6

From the Czech Coup to the Death of Stalin 43
The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy 46
What Caused the Cold War? 49
Assessing the Soviet Threat 51
The East-West Conflict: Détente and After 55
From Cold War to Détente 56
Transformations in the Soviet-American Relationship 57
Stability of the European Balance 58 Strategic Stability 60 From Bipolarity toward Multipolarity 61 Increased Importance of the Developing World 63 Lessening Ideological Militancy 64
The Rise of Détente 65
Détente in Europe 67 Soviet-American Détente 67 Arms Control Negotiations 68
The Demise of Détente 69
Managing the Soviet-American Conflict 73
Three Perspectives on Soviet Behavior 74
The North-South Conflict 81
The Revolutions of Modernization and Nationalism 83
How Important Is the South? 88
What Characterizes the South? 90
Third and Fourth Worlds 98
Dilemmas of Development 100
Ethnicity as a Major Source of Conflict 103
The South and the East-West Conflict 105
The South and World Politics 108
Nuclear Weapons and World Politics 113
The Impact of the Nuclear Era 114 The Nuclear Balance 115
The fraction Duminice 110

Can There Be Meaningful Nuclear Superiority?	117
Arms Control and the Superpowers 119	
Implications for the United States 120 Implications for the Soviet Union 122 What Is There to Negotiate? 123	
Problems of Deterrence 124	
The Moral Challenge 124 Countervailing Strategies and Nuclear War-Fighting Deterrence versus Defense 126 Decision Making under Crisis Conditions 126 Technical Problems of Command and Control 127 Nuclear Disarmament 128 Strategic Defense 128	125
Nuclear Weapons and Conventional Weapons	129
The Future of Nuclear Deterrence 130	

Part III

Watersheds in Twentieth-Century International Relations 137

7 Interpretations of the Past: 1914 versus 1938 139

1914 and the Outbreak of World War I 141

The Rigidifying Balance of Power
The Schlieffen Plan 143
Beliefs and the Outbreak of War
The Onset of War 145
The Lessons of 1914 146
Ambiguous Lessons 148

Appeasement and the Origins of World War II 149

Implications 155

8	A Glimpse into the Abyss: The Cuban Missile Crisis 159
	Origins of the Crisis 160
	Discovery of the Missiles 161 The Naval Quarantine of Cuba 162
	The Cuban Missile Crisis: Causes 164
	Soviet Calculations 165 American Calculations 166
	Interpretations of the Crisis: Victory, Defeat, or Recklessness? 168
	Interpretation No. 1: An American Victory 168 Interpretation No. 2: An American Defeat 169 Interpretation No. 3: Recklessness or Lack of Necessity 170
	The Cuban Missile Crisis: Implications 172
	The Cuban Missile Crisis in Retrospect 173
9	Vietnam and the Limits of Intervention 177
	Origins of the Vietnam War 179
	Origins of American Involvement 181
	The Kennedy Administration's Response 183 The Tonkin Gulf Incident 185 National Interest and the American Response 186
	De-escalation and Withdrawal 187
	Public Opinion and the Vietnam War 187 The Nixon Administration and Vietnamization 188 The Paris Peace Agreements 190
	The Collapse of South Vietnam 191
	The Lessons of Vietnam 192
	What Went Wrong with United States Policy? 193 Military Problems 194 Vietnam, Grand Strategy, and the Limits of American Power 195 The Tragedy of Indochina 197
10	The Oil Decade 201
	The World Oil Regime on the Eve of the Crisis 202
	Oil and the Yom Kippur War 204

	Revolution in Iran and the Second Oil Shock 207
	Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Oil Decade 209
	Oil Power and the Role of OPEC 210 Oil Power and the Role of Saudi Arabia 212 Oil Power and the Role of the United States 215 Oil Power and the LDCs 216 The Oil Crisis, Middle East Instability, and the Arab-Israeli
	Conflict 218
	The Oil Decade: Retrospect and Prospect 219
	A Future Oil Shock? 220
Dant	TX7
Part 1	
Orde	r and the "Anarchical Society" 225
11	The Causes of War 227
11	
	War: Diverse Explanations 229
	First Image Explanations 232 Second Image Explanations 233 Third Image Explanations 235
	The Security Dilemma and the International System 236
	The Case of the Falkland Islands 237 System-Induced Conflict: The Case of the Six Day War 238 A Domestic Contrast: The Case of the Colorado River 240 System-Induced Conflict: The Game of Prisoner's Dilemma 241
	The Mitigation of Conflict 245
	The Case of Postwar Europe 247
	Is the Anarchy Paradigm Exaggerated? 247
	Implications 248
12	The Search for Global Order 255
	Failure of Collective Security: The League of Nations 256
	Limits of Globalism: The Problem of the United Nations 259
	The United Nations and the Security Dilemma 261 War Prevention 261 Human Rights 265

14

	Justice and Respect for International Law 266 Social Progress and Better Living Standards 267 A Balance Sheet on the United Nations 268
I	nternational Law 269
I	Limits of Globalism 274
7	The Search for Regional Order 277
	Origins of Unity in Western Europe 279
T	The European Coal and Steel Community 281
1	The European Defense Community (EDC) 282
Γ	The European Common Market 283
F	European Integration: Successes 284
F	European Integration: Limits and Failures 288
Ι	Limits of the European Model 292
I	mplications of the European Experience 292
7	The Search for Economic Order 299
T	The International Political Economy 300
	Modernization and the Transformation of the World Economy 302
E	Economic Penetration of the Nation-State 305
C	Constraints on National Policy: France 307
C	Constraints on National Policy: The United States 310
	America's Hegemonic Role in the Post–World War II Vorld 311
	The Erosion of American Hegemony 312 Implications for International Cooperation 314
I	nterdependence: Divergent Views 315
	The Globalist or "Institutionalist" Perspective 316 Modifications of Interdependence 316 Marxist and Neo-Marxist Conceptions 317 Realist and Neorealist Interpretations 318

319

The Limits of Interdependence

Part V

Conclusion: Anarchy, Order, and

Constraint 325

> 15 Conclusion 327

> > The Enduring Features of International Relations:

Anarchy 328

The Enduring Features of International Relations: Order and the Mitigation of Anarchy 329

Alliances

329

Power Balances

330 Limits to the Applicability of Power in Mitigating Anarchy

Diplomacy and Negotiations 333

Economic Interdependence 334

The Enduring Features of International Relations:

Constraints on State Behavior 334

The Neorealist Imperative 335

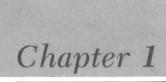
Moral Imperatives

The Relationship of Understanding to Action 337

Index 341

Part I

Introduction: The Context of World Politics



Understanding International Relations

Albert Einstein was once asked, "Why is it that when the mind of man has stretched so far as to discover the structure of the atom we have been unable to devise the political means to keep the atom from destroying us?" He replied, "That is simple, my friend, it is because politics is more difficult than physics."

Nations dwell in perpetual anarchy, for no central authority imposes limits on the pursuit of sovereign interests. . . . At times, the absence of centralized international authority precludes attainment of common goals. . . . Yet at other times, states do realize common goals through cooperation under anarchy. — KENNETH OYE²